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# The Changing Criteria of Social Networks in a Cajun Community

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## I. Introduction

The Cajuns of Louisiana can be best compared to those North-American ethnic minorities that are loosely tied together through endogamy, common dialects, a shared charter of history and a sense of territorial belonging.<sup>1</sup> This emphasis on sub-ethnic identities is also found among native American groups such as the Pueblo (Spicer and Thompson 1972), and the Dene, or in some immigrant groups such as the Macedonians (Vasiliadis 1978), for whom micro-level behaviour carries with it the principal markers and ideologies of 'group' identity, whether these be self-selected or ascribed. In most of these groups, including the Cajun and Creole regional populations in Louisiana,<sup>2</sup> an historical pattern of economic and political marginality and social isolation has stymied the emergence of a national consciousness or of a macro-level organizational framework under the guidance of an accepted ethnic elite. A region of French Louisiana that has developed strong sub-ethnic identities is the Great Southwestern Prairie, where Acadian settlers intermarried with French, German, Italian, and American migrants.

The resulting regional culture, formed over five generations (1830—1930) also culturally absorbed ex-slaves, free men of colour (*Créoles de couleur*), and Indians. Their French-speaking communities on the Prairie rapidly developed a remarkable homogeneity that contrasts sharply with Anglo-Louisianan communities north of the 'French parishes'.<sup>3</sup> The North Louisianans have historically referred to the expanded Acadian population to the south as 'Cajuns',<sup>4</sup> an ascribed identity that carried with it, until the 1960's, a connotation of inferiority and of stigma. On the Prairie, a Cajun identity was accepted with reluctance over the more favoured terms of

'Créole' or 'Acadian'. Furthermore, the reference group of individual French-speakers (Cajuns) hardly ever included 'Cajun' communities elsewhere in Louisiana. The most relevant units of reference were the extended family and the neighbourhood, social units that are still at the base of prairie Cajun identity.

The objective of this discussion is to show how local networks are a means of communication through which ethnic identities are articulated. Changes in the construction of these social networks are shown to be the consequence of recent socio-economic transformation of rural "Cajun" society. The recently-differentiated group is sorted into discrete sub-categories, each of which manifests different criteria for the formation of social networks. This inquiry is a first step in understanding, at a micro-level, processes of ethnic differentiation that are relevant to explaining changes in all of French-speaking Louisiana.

The ethnographic examples chosen for this discussion are from a pilot household survey in Cajun Prairie (*pseudonym*), Louisiana, carried out in French, by a research team from Université Laval and York University.<sup>5</sup> The objectives of our research were to study the adaptations of French-speaking Louisianans in the context of a recent 'French' revival movement (Gold 1975b; Dorais, Gold and Waddell 1976). Our previous experiences had been in the context of French-speaking Quebec, with its highly developed national culturally-based institutions (Gold 1975a), and with comparative material from French Canadian minorities such as the Franco-Ontarians (e.g. Jackson, 1975), Acadians (e.g. Tremblay 1973) and Franco-Americans (e.g. Lemaire 1966). All of these minorities at one time shared the Church-centered institutions and liberal-professional elites of a French Canadian presence, or *rayonnement*, in Northern North America, a culture that had developed an ideology of their divinely-inspired mission of survival or *survivance* (Joyal and Bernard 1945; Bergeron 1967; Rioux 1973).

The Louisiana French offer a promising possibility of comparative analysis with the French Canadians. In contrast to relative linguistic and ideological homogeneity in Quebec, French Canada among Canadian Acadians, the Louisiana French minorities are linguistically, racially and ethnically heterogeneous (Gold 1979c; Waddell 1979a). They have never developed the clerical and ideological edifice that characterized their northern neighbours, although there were some attempts and a more recent determined effort at a unified ethnic revival (Gold 1977). The comparison can also be extended to the integration of the rural domestic economy of French households into a capitalist wage economy, which occurred somewhat later in Louisiana.

In this context, micro-level differentiation among French-speaking Louisianans is particularly significant in that it is often the only level at which the population can effectively be studied. Unlike the Canadian situation, there are few broader sources of data that provide an adequate explanation of the present status of the Louisiana French. For this reason, this preliminary inquiry is focussed on the variables of territorial identification, language use, the strength of family ties, and age and sex differences. These variables are shown to be useful in sorting people into different kinds of networks within Prairie Cajun society. Also, the participation of individuals within a network can be shown to be part of the definition of the ethnic boundary between Cajuns and others. Taken this far, the question is a transactional one, but this discussion is not limited to the assumption that all modes of recruitment can be collapsed into a single set of rules that explain who is Cajun or who is not. There is a symbolic and dialectical sense of being Cajun which is handled differently by individuals and by their networks; this is a second major concern.

An important observation from the Cajun research is that in-group affiliation is expressed in a behavioral code that is situationally-deployed—a restricted code, to make an analogy with Bernstein's (1972) distinctions.<sup>6</sup> A potential implication of this assertion is that linguistic difference, *per se*, can only occasionally constitute the ethnic boundary. A second implication is that the criteria for recruitment or affiliation to ethnic networks must be understood in the context of the economic and social differentiation that has accompanied the upheaval of 'traditional' Cajun society after the Second World War. This is necessary since the context of ethnic messages is now mediated by occupational and status differences that have selectively altered the earlier categorization of groups and quasi-groups on the basis of territory, family, sex and, of course, language. With the decline of sharecropping and of cotton cultivation in the Prairie, agriculture as an occupation is now second to service industries in both the public and private sector. Many of those who would have been employed in cotton-farming a generation ago or those who would have migrated to the cities, are now involved in oil field work or in petroleum-related services that permit them to continue residing in their home region.<sup>7</sup>

The results of pilot research in Southwest Louisiana demonstrate that Cajuns who provide services to other Cajuns, the new middle class of the Prairies, are the most assertive in using the symbolic or primordial aspects of their identity as a resource. As such, they are also the most active in going beyond refusal or self-denial of a Cajun identity to actively manage the symbolic content of Cajun-ness. Moreover, their concern with being Cajun becomes a valued means of preserving their clients and guarding

against encroachment from outside monopolies. It is important to note that the new middle class, those who can best manage ethnic difference, are not necessarily those whose behaviour outsiders identify as being the most Cajun (i.e. the unilinguals, musicians, farmers, fishermen and trappers).

Whereas being Cajun once involved a passive acceptance of Cajun French, Cajun foods, and Cajun custom, the range of these indicators of Cajun-ness has now shrunk under the selective pressures of acculturation. For most of those over sixty, speaking English represents an intrusion into the social networks through which they negotiate everyday life. Their diet and daily round have not altered radically since their youth. However, for those between twenty-five and sixty, French use and participation in the most visible and demonstrative institutions of Cajun culture often constitute conscious and deliberate behaviour choices. That is, the extraction of what had been primordial aspects of Cajun-ness and their employment in daily, weekly or yearly rituals become, on a group basis, a collective transaction that verges on the management of symbols or the placing of ethnic markers. However, this analysis is not concerned with the attribution of a formal rationality (i.e., profit) to this management of identity which may be pertinent for certain individuals.

As our data are still being analyzed, this discussion considers responses from only one of a sample of neighbourhoods that were studied in 1976 in the small town of Cajun Prairie (population 3000). Households in the Fontenot neighbourhood are representative of both the old families of the village of Cajun Prairie and of the sharecroppers who migrated to the village in the 1950's. The context of this neighbourhood permits analysis of the bases and process of network formation that can be related to most of the community and, in a general sense to Cajun society in the Prairies. Rather than reconstruct separately the changes that have occurred in Cajun Prairie, this will be done in the context of the social networks of the Fontenot neighbourhood residents. The question of ethnicity and social network will then be reconsidered.

## II. Social Networks in Fontenot Neighbourhood

The construction of the household sample in Cajun Prairie was designed partly with the objective of understanding neighbourhood and personal networks. It includes both town and countryside. White, black and *gens de couleur* neighbourhoods representing 83 %, 15 % and about 2 % respectively, of the total population. In the absence of census tracts, a

rough indicator of household socio-economic standing was developed from mapping the town and its hinterland. Within the town itself, ten neighbourhoods were selected for study, in which the household heads of every third house were interviewed. Pretests showed quite clearly that such a sampling technique would uncover a representative range of occupations and age groups. No provision was made for non-Cajun households which are less than 5% of the entire sample of 205 homes, and are spread throughout the community. With very few exceptions, the interviews were carried out by francophone interviewers, in Cajun French, or in a mixture of French and English. It was felt that the bias introduced by insisting on French was adequately compensated for by questions on language use and by our daily observations. The advantage, especially with the older informants was an initial opening of the ethnic boundary—although this was quickly patched by some householders who would return their own questions such as: "do you people, in 'la Canada', eat squirrel jambalaya?"

The overall objective of these interviews was to serve as a pilot study on the organization of Cajun households, their relative integration into American society and their mobilization into Louisiana's French Movement, and hence to guide work which continued (1977—1978) in two rural 'hearths' of Cajun culture,<sup>9</sup> and in three urban areas.<sup>10</sup> In all these studies, other important foci are migration and occupational change within the family, the strength of intra- and inter-family ties and the relative importance attached to Cajun customs of death, illness, marriage and diet. Age, occupation, education, and language use emerge as significant dependent variables in predicting the mobilization of different segments of the local population. These are also variables that clearly differentiate one neighbourhood from another.

The neighbourhood of 'Fontenot' is nestled in four blocks of frame houses on the southeast edge of Cajun Prairie, between the older houses at the centre of town and a new subdivision of offshore oil workers and tradesmen ('Estropiéville'), many of whom are disabled. Whereas Estropiéville's brick suburban homes were built in the late 1960's, some of the cypress-walled Cajun-style homes of Fontenot date back to the founding of Cajun Prairie in 1910. However, most of Fontenot's residents can be traced to the subsequent immigration of former share-croppers, from the cotton-growing communities of the surrounding countryside which date back to the mid-nineteenth century.

Using only the criteria of age, 13 of the 16 households sampled in Fontenot have heads of household over fifty years of age (average for the entire sample is approximately 48 years). When length of residence is added as a criterion of selection, one finds that only three of the 'over-fifty' group

have resided in Fontenot for over twenty years (17 % of the Cajun Prairie sample has not moved in the past 20 years). Applying but one criterion of occupational change, the presence of white collar-employees, two more household heads, both of them teachers, stand out as being quite different from the others. These three criteria of age, length of residence, and occupational change, and a fourth, language at home are sufficient to identify four clusters of households. Within each of these clusters there is a similar constellation of social networks, a similar pattern of language use, a common perspective on the importance and deployment of ethnic symbols. The overall differences between these clusters (A, B, C and D) of households in Fontenot is summarized in Table One.

Table 1. *Age, Sex, Occupation, Language in Home and Years of Residence of Sixteen Household Heads in the Fontenot Neighbourhood*

	Age of household head (sex)	Years in domicile	Share-cropping history	language <sup>1</sup> in home	Occupation
<i>Household</i>					
1.	77 (m)	42	no	bilingual	retired farmer-miller
2.	68 (m)	30	no	bilingual	retired farmer
3.	57 (m)	21	no	bilingual	tradesman
4.	67 (m)	17	yes	French	retired municipal worker
5.	66 (m)	10+	yes	French	retired sharecropper
6.	62 (m)	11	yes	French	retired mill worker
7.	72 (m)	5	yes	French	retired sharecropper
8.	65 (m)	4	yes	French	retired mill worker
9.	55 (m)	5	yes	French	road work
10.	57 (f)	2	yes	French	widow (hu-road work)
11.	55 (f)	1	yes	French	widow (hu-sharecropper)
12.	56 (m)	10+	no	English	teacher
13.	51 (m)	19	no	(single)	teacher
14.	27 (m)	2	no	English	offshore and tradesman
15.	33 (m)	3	no	English	tradesman
16.	39 (m)	—	no	English (with children)	disabled offshore worker

<sup>1</sup> All respondents spoke French during the interviews.

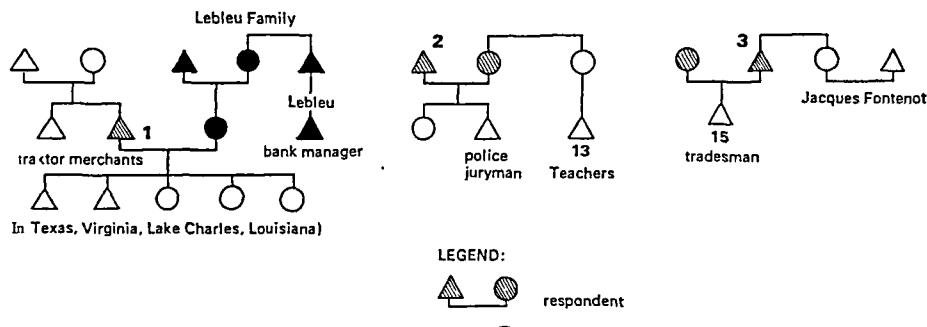
### A. THE OLDEST RESIDENTS OF FONTENOT

When Cajun Prairie was incorporated in 1910, most of the new village belonged to the Lebleu family. The densely-populated countryside was divided into sharecropping communities that had developed on the land of the original homesteaders or on land held by non-resident land owners, particularly a Jewish family of doctors from the town of Opelousas, 30 miles to the southeast of Cajun Prairie. The first residents of the village were tradesmen and merchants including four cotton gin operators who dealt with sharecroppers and their landlord. These mercantile families, which included some of the few non-French speakers in the sub-region, purchased large street-to-street lots from the Lebleu family, who were themselves active in money-lending, cotton ginning, and in agriculture.

One of these sections, a parcel of 32 lots, was sold to Jacques Fontenot, a landed farmer and taxi driver, allegedly for 260 dollars; Fontenot then sold off his lots to the first settlers of the Fontenot neighbourhood. In this way, respondent # 3 (Table One) was able to acquire land through his mother who had inherited a plot that belonged to Jacques Fontenot who is her son-in-law. Respondent # 1 was more fortunate in his access to resources in that his wife is a member of the more affluent Lebleu family.

Cajun Prairie had many empty lots before 1950, when most inhabitants of the Prairie still lived in the countryside communities. Consequently, it is quite common to find the sons and daughters of the first village residents living in subdivided lots next to their parents' original home. Thus householder # 15, lives on the other half of his father's lot (# 3), and both men work together as skilled tradesmen in construction. However, for most couples seeking housing after 1950, partilocal residence was more difficult to arrange unless the lots had been purchased earlier and reserved for them. As a result, after that date, family groups tended to disperse through the town, with relative proximity to kin still remaining as an important consideration.

The personal networks of the long time residents thus include extensive and influential kinsmen among whom there is almost daily contact through visiting and commensalism. Figure I illustrates several of these strong linkages: family # 1 is related to the wealthy Lebleus; family # 2 includes a member of the Parish Police Jury<sup>11</sup> whose political influence in Parish government is a useful asset; and family # 3 has the noteworthy tie with 'pioneering' Jacques Fontenot, a link that gave them access to choice village land. The youngest of these men (# 2 and # 3) are also part of regular high-stakes card-playing groups, and at least one man (# 2) is heavily involved in local politics and attends frequent political suppers.<sup>12</sup> In general,



**Fig. I. Fontenot Neighbourhood—Condensed Networks of Long-Time Residents ['A']**

this cluster of old timers includes the most prestigious and influential residents of the neighbourhood and their families have strong ties throughout Cajun Prairie and its vicinity. While they converse occasionally with most of their neighbours, they do not share meals with them nor visit in their homes.

Significantly, none of these long-time residents is involved in activities that deal explicitly with 'Cajun-ness'. They also use substantially more English at home than most other Fontenot residents of their age (e.g. Group B). This can be explained by the history of commercial and political contacts that older residents have had with English-speaking 'Américains'. They are also relatively well-educated for their age and have at least a high school education, in most instances. This orientation by long-term residents to the wider American society was evident, in the 1930's in the sometimes strained relationship between the village children and the children from the coves, especially those at the high school level.

With a stronger external orientation and an extra-local reference group, the long-time residents in Group 'A' manifest a greater concern about their status in American society and over the stigma of being different. One couple aptly illustrates the manner in which long-term residents seek to avoid stigma by characterizing 'spoiled' identities including Cajun identity as a *rites de passage* in a step model of Americanization.

M: It's a big thing today—this Cajun thing.

Mme: They used to make fun of Cajuns ... because we had never gone to school.

M: Not us, but our great grandparents used to make fun of the Indians. That's how it is. There's just a wheel that's turning ... you see this is how it works like with the Negroes ...

## B. THE EX-SHARECROPPERS (HOUSEHOLD # 4—# 11)— MIGRANTS FROM THE COVES

Half of the residents of Fontenot spent most of their lives as self-sufficient sharecroppers, planting cotton, corn and beans in the surrounding countryside. But most of these families have given up farming since 1960. Before moving to town, their daily rituals were carried out within their neighbourhood social circle or *société*. These *sociétés* formed strongly-identified communities or “coves” (*anses*) of several hundred residents (cf. Gold 1979b). It was here that they raised their children, met their wives, bought essential supplies at the country store, went to weekly house dances (*bals* or *fais-do-do*), and established strong kinship-based networks. Sociability in the coves was carried on largely outside the small sharecroppers’ houses, on the balconies, along the roads, and in the country stores. Men could expand their networks while on trips into town where there were often long waits before unloading the crop at the cotton gins. Neighbours provided each other with meat through a rotating hog butchery (*boucherie en bloc*). Buildings were erected and crops were harvested through ‘giving a hand’ (*donner la main* and a *coup de main*). In short, the egalitarian world of the coves, functioning entirely in Cajun French was the outer limit of most transactions for sharecroppers until the 1950’s. The town was a place for the *gros chiens* (‘big dogs’) who controlled money-lending, cotton ginning and the larger business. Schools did not penetrate the coves until the early twentieth century and bussing to the village began in the mid-thirties. Most rural Cajuns received only a few years of schooling that were frequently interrupted by the hoeing and picking of cotton. Most of the ex-sharecroppers in Fontenot neighbourhood are functionally illiterate.

After 1950, sharecropping was abandoned rapidly in favour of capital intensive rice cultivation. The village of Cajun Prairie more than doubled its population between 1950 and 1970,<sup>13</sup> and some of the cove neighbourhoods were completely emptied. Only the entrance ways and chimneys of transported houses bear witness to the “coves” and their strong local loyalties that persist only as oral tradition. Thus, the *culture* of Cajun Prairie has its recent roots in the coves, and the kin networks of most of its residents have fresh foundations within a bygone mode of production. The urbanization of the village and the emergence of a town service economy are inseparable from the transformation of the countryside.

Once in town, the sharecroppers could only partially reconstruct the dense networks of the coves. They were limited both linguistically and socially in obtaining employment in the surrounding small cities. Until the late sixties, when welfare alternatives were available, a viable option was

to open a small business that served former-cove dwellers in Cajun French. This continued and further incurred familial and neighbourhood obligations. Because so many migrants turned to small commerce—grocery stores, repair shops, construction trades—every family has some kin they turn to for essential services. Only a few of these business are located in the Fontenot neighbourhood, partly because many residents have moved to better housing, but also because Fontenot is tucked away from the main throughfare. In the past ten years, Fontenot has become a peripheral area. It has attracted older, retired sharecroppers who seek to live out their days next to people they know and can speak with, and to till a large enough garden that can reduce their new dependency on the cash economy. This cluster of households has fallen back for support on their kinship ties, networks that have dwindled as relatives pass away, move elsewhere, or become too incapacitated to visit, to meet at family suppers or to attend dance halls and public events.

At home, all of the ex-sharecroppers speak exclusively in French. Most are illiterate and have a very limited knowledge of English. For example, one man explained that he can no longer visit his relatives, because there are now too many incomprehensible road signs. Others are unable to converse with their grandchildren, who cannot speak French. Two respondents (# 10 and # 11) are widows whose networks of contact have been atrophied further through the deaths of their husbands. Only one person works at a steady job (# 9). The others spend their days outside on the porch or in the garden, talking with neighbours or visiting relatives. As three informants told us: “here it’s all Cajun”.

It is significant that little of this exterior Frenchness extends to visiting and commensalism (see Figure II), perhaps because instead of balcony to balcony socializing, many Cajun Prairie homes are now darkened and shut to accommodate the new “essential” of air-conditioning. Leisure hours are wiled away in front of the omnipresent television set limiting the time available for afternoon conversations. Yet for the retired sharecroppers, ties with neighbours are of cultivated civility, always and only in Cajun French. Those private and intimate relationships that remain are with family, to the extent that relatives are in the proximity of Fontenot neighbourhood. It is in this group, in all of Cajun Prairie, that we find a disproportionate number of suicides<sup>14</sup> and dependence on welfare payments since the expansion of Federal anti-poverty programs, such as Food Stamps. This reliance on weak ties in the neighbourhood and strong ties within the family, as summarized in Figure II, is evocative of a similar situation of alienation in the older urban working class district of Quebec City.<sup>15</sup>

Whereas Group A has avoided the expressive part of Cajun-ness, Group

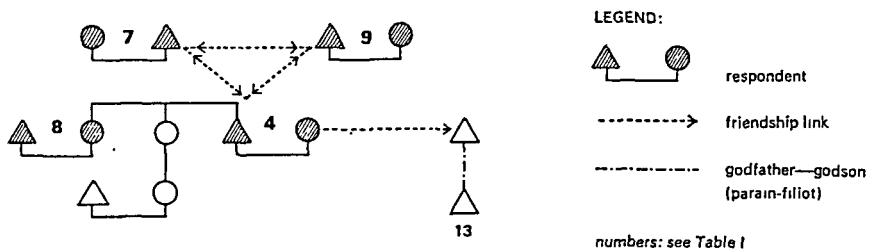


Fig. II. *Sociability among the Ex-Sharecroppers of Fontenot Neighbourhood ['B']*

B lives it, without consciously expressing their identities. Only one person goes regularly to Fred's Lounge on Saturday morning to take in old time Cajun music, while several others remain at home to listen to this and other Cajun radio shows.<sup>18</sup> The greatest interest of the old sharecroppers is in the 5:00 p.m. news in French when the deaths of the day and funeral parlour wakes are announced. There are some exceptions, like respondent # 4, who has lived in Fontenot longer than the others, and who socializes with the numerous Cajun Prairie musicians, and still goes to 'French' dances.<sup>19</sup>

In general, the ex-sharecroppers are as uninvolved in articulating their Cajun-ness as are the older residents. The difference is that they have not felt the impact of ethnic difference to the same extent. They are aware of their neighbourhood as a 'Cajun' place, a social field in which they can talk French to everyone. But, unlike the long-time residents, they have not had a lifetime of contacts with English-speaking Louisianans ("Américains"). They make little attempt to under-communicate their Cajun-ness. Cajuns, to these ex-sharecroppers, are French-speaking and poor. As we heard in one household this attitude is more strongly held among the men who often had received less schooling than the wives.

Mme: ... A Cajun is someone who speaks more in French than in English.  
We have a mixed language.

M: Yes, but *chère, c'est pas juste ça! Tu vas voir quelque'un qui est pauv' misérable ... on va dire que c'est un Cajun.*  
(Yes, but dear, it's not just that! You're going to see someone who is poor and miserable ... they'll say that's a Cajun)

Mme: Yes, some people have the habit of saying that.

### C. MANAGING IDENTITY, BEING CAJUN AMIST THE "AMÉRICAINS" (# 12—# 13)

The two teachers in Group C are part of a town-wide network of teachers, merchants and some lawyers who selectively live their Frenchness or select to live by it. Ranging from the ages of forty to fifty-five, these men form several interlocking social circles, which meet regularly for beer and storytelling, outdoor suppers, Cajun music, and the work party of a *coup de main*. In these situations, they switch in and out of Cajun dialect and, in this behaviour, they attempt to be faithful to 'tradition'. For example, at a *coup de main* to dig a well (translation on the left):

I brought the beer and whiskey to camp on Sunday morning and we began to dig that well. We got down to 27 feet and we just could dig no further. So they drank my 4 cases of beer and my fifth of whiskey and they ate the 20 chickens that I had barbecued.

There was George Manuel, married to one of my second cousins, and she was there too. Our friend Edward Smith [an Américain], and Jake Edwards [a Cajun teacher], another one of my second cousins and his wife Nicole and Philippe Marcel from France, Simon Marcantel [a painter] and his wife ... And those little ones were running around everywhere.

Evob and his father ... he played the accordion and turned the chicken ... and we danced with the drill.

Some didn't eat ... 20, 30 minutes of work and they left.

*They came just to say that they had been to a coup de main ... It was a part of a holiday. The guys had a good time ... But we dug the wells ... saved 200 dollars. That's the idea of a coup de main.*

J'ai amené ca (whiskey and beer) au camp et le dimanche matin ... on a commencé à fouiller le puits. On a été à 27 pieds et là on pouvait plus fouiller ... Ils ont bu mes 4 caisses de bière et mon fifth de whiskey et ils ont mangé mes vingt poulets que j'avais barbecués ... Il y'avait George Manuel, marié avec un de mes deuxièmes cousins et elle était là. Notre ami Edward Smith [an Américain]. Il y'avait Jake Edwards [a Cajun teacher], un de mes deuxièmes cousins et sa femme, Nicole et Philippe Marcel de la France, Simon Marcantel [a painter] et sa femme, ... Ah les petits qui couraient tout partout. Evob et son père ... lui il a joué de l'accordéon et il a tourné le poulet ... et nous on dansait avec la tarière. Y en a qu'ont pas mangé ... un 20, 30 minutes de travail, ils ont parti. *Ils venaient juste pour dire, well, qu'ils était venus dans un coup de main ... c'était une fête. Les bougres ont eu de l'agrément. Mais on a fouillé le puits ... sauvé 200 piastres, c'est ça l'idée d'un coup de main.*

The backgrounds of the participants in this network are quite similar. Most have been in the army, away to college, or out to work in a large city. They returned to Cajun Prairie buoyed by the confidence that the outside world had placed in their French or in their Cajun-ness, only to find the French culture of their home town seriously threatened. In most cases they found that despite their recent ethnic pride, it was "too late" to bring up their own children as French-speakers, even though their own primary socialization may have been exclusively in French. Those who had been to college became teachers or professionals, while the others went into small businesses to serve the swelling population of the town (1950—1960). As bilinguals, they were familiar with both the world of the coves and the realities of the agri-business and petroleum industry that currently shape the regional economy.

The most vocal of the new middle class was a French teacher, Revon Reed, and a young lawyer, Paul Tate, who invested their energies in a large scale revival and re-organization of the rural *La Course du Mardi Gras*.<sup>18</sup> In this manner, Mardi Gras, perhaps the only significant "Cajun" celebration of the coves was turned into a well-organized town festival under the watchful eyes of the organizers and their captains.

From the Mardi Gras, the leaders of popular revival in Cajun Prairie (Gold 1976) turned to the revival and preservation of "traditional" Cajun music.<sup>19</sup> Reed, and later two small merchant-musicians from Cajun Prairie began both live and recorded Cajun French radio shows, broadcasting from predominantly English language stations of the nearest two large towns. With heavy advertising from their personal networks of local merchants, the announcers frequently use ethnic messages sometimes heavily over-communicated (to an all Cajun audience and clientele).

It is not a coincidence that Cajun Prairie, serving an area of five thousand people, has managed to keep its small merchants thriving and to exclude the large retailing chains. Not only does the economy of the town operate in Cajun French, but so does its municipal police force, the tellers at the bank, the clerks in the stores and even the teachers in the common rooms of the all English language schools.

With its considerable involvement in public life, the bilingual group is also highly visible in local politics for which the hotly contested electoral campaigns are waged almost exclusively in French (Gold 1979a). In sum, the group that has most experienced the difference between Cajun and "Américain" has been the most concerned with managing the symbols of that difference. On the one hand, this management must be compatible with keeping a clientele, staying in business and in charge of their own community. On the other hand, beyond the immediate transactional bene-

fits, the management of Cajun symbols by the bilingual group is also contextually altruistic in that it leads to its own rewards in the satisfaction of consciously preserving the cultural codes that have given their lives irreplaceable richness. This point is repeatedly added to virtually every life history and narrative account of 'popular revival' in Cajun Prairie.

It is this group that has sought and attracted a stream of francophone visitors from Quebec and from Europe, turning Cajun Prairie into a route stop on pilgrimages through what remains of *l'Amérique française*. As a consequence, the personal networks of at least six Cajun Prairie bilinguals extend to such cities as Quebec, Joliette, Le Havre, Carcassonne and Brussels. Instead of being a novelty in the town's weekly routine, the foreigners have become almost part of the scenery, a dimension of Prairie Cajun life that is stage-managed by leaders of popular revival but kept separate from the private realm of most households (Gold 1977).

Cajun Prairie musicians are getting bookings in Quebec and in Paris. French, Quebecois and Belgian film makers have put Cajun Prairie into to living room of millions of foreign francophones.<sup>20</sup> Revon Reed has published a social history of Cajun Prairie that has been a best seller—in Quebec. He also edits a new Cajun Prairie *bilingual* weekly for the lawyer, Paul Tate, that has a substantial number of foreign subscribers. The newspaper prints Cajun jokes, local history and folklore—bilingually, alongside of local news, politics and obituaries—in English.

The two teachers in Fontenot neighbourhood, both of whom are closely related to at least two older residents (# 2 and # 4 and # 8—see Figure III), represent this bilingual group and mirror the group's support of Louisiana's "French Movement", both in its popular manifestation and at the state level in the CODOFIL school programmes.<sup>21</sup> Ironically, they are, in a traditional sense, the least 'Cajun' of groups A through C, but they are the only group to go beyond traditional modes of group organization, managing and deploying symbolic aspects of Cajun-ness. Their action is both a redefinition of the context of Cajun cultural symbols and an extension of that context across the ethnic boundary to those who have linguistic and cultural affinities. It is not suggested that they are typical of other Cajun Prairie networks involved in modern occupations, or that there is no transactional gain from their redefinition of ethnic boundaries, or that they are the first of a widespread revival. The general lines of contact in the 'bilingual' network are summarized in Figure III.

Most people in network C are quite vocal about their American-ness, without wishing to be *Américain*—the derogatory term Cajuns have applied to Anglo-Americans. Despite their origins in some of the oldest landed families of Cajun Prairie (but not necessarily wealthy by national stan-

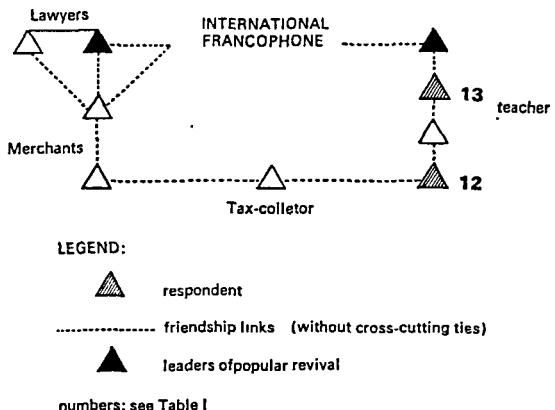


Fig. III. *Bonds of Friendship—the ‘Bilingual’ Group of Teachers and Merchants in Cajun Prairie [‘C’]*

dards), the bilinguals in network ‘C’ see the difference between themselves and others to be narrowing. They are also the most willing to suggest that the State can assist them in retaining their identity. To quote one of the teachers of the Fontenot sample:

“I am American and secondly Cajun, (but) I think that the movement will renew our culture and that it will do us some good—CODOFIL<sup>21</sup> and all that.”

And a merchant in the same network commenting on the teacher-broadcaster’s book expresses the other side of the same sentiments:

“I’m happy that someone has written a book in my Cajun language, so that I can understand it.”

The activities of the bilingual network represented by group ‘C’ have a strong innovative appeal to the young offshore oil workers and tradesmen found in group ‘D’.

#### D. GROWING UP CAJUN—OILWORKERS AND TRADESMEN UNDER FORTY (# 14—# 16)

The last three respondents listed in Table One are somewhat out of place in Fontenot neighbourhood: Like the two teachers, they have kin links with the older residents. Respondent # 14 works with his father (in the neighbourhood but not included in the sample) on construction when he is not offshore. His father-in-law, an elderly and popular bar-owner, also lives with them. They speak French to the old man but, like respondents # 15 and # 16, they speak English to each other and to their children. Householder # 15 has lived in two different 'offshore-oil' subdivisions before returning to his father's (# 3) land and his grandmother's vacant house. Both # 14 and # 15 work with their fathers in construction crews, and the language of work is almost always French. Finally, # 16 presents a case of a complete disengagement from the older occupational linkages. He has invested heavily into 'suburbanizing' his older home and is disabled from an offshore accident.

None of these three informants draw their friends from Fontenot neighbourhood. Although they are all family-oriented and belong to the neighbourhood primarily because of their families, their personal networks range as far away as Texas and have their roots in school peer groups and in work crews. Whereas work draws the men together, sometimes as French speakers, the wives of the oil workers bond together for protection and comfort when their men are away on their dangerous offshore shifts. Those who are injured, and the ratio is very high in Cajun Prairie, come back with an insurance settlement and join the permanent male networks of the town, often taking on a sideline to make ends meet. The relationship of the three men in cluster D to the neighbourhood and to their personal networks is summarized in Figure IV.

Significantly, instead of disrupting the community, oil work exerts a stabilizing influence on a community threatened by a massive out-migration of youth. Cash is injected into a town without industries and the men return for one to three week periods between shifts, making them available for suppers, dances, festivals and politics. It is only when they come back as permanent residents that the young workers modify their pessimistic or part-time interest in the cultural and linguistic aspects of 'Cajun-ness'! Thus one of the men insists the Cajun-ness "is more the territory than the language" and another contradicts him by saying: "you speak French, then you're Cajun". Either way, the oil worker-tradesman reduces identity to minimal terms and, while back in town, may gradually use his identity to mobilize resources in his dealings with others.

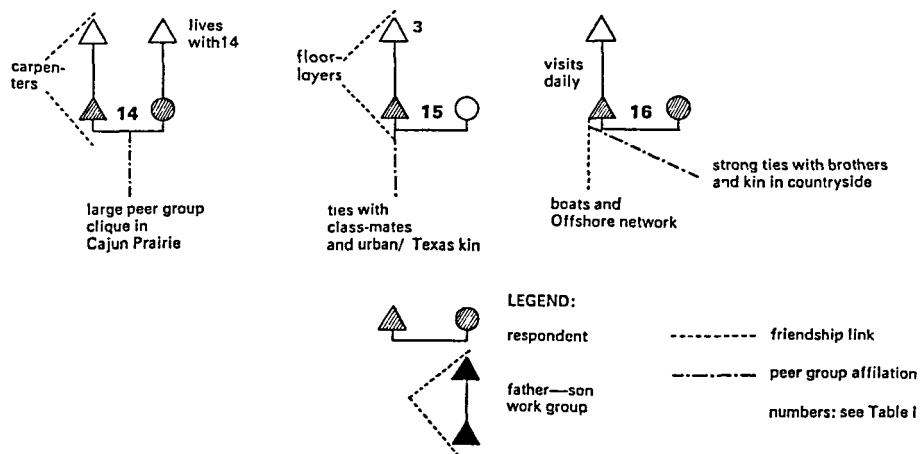


Fig. IV. *Kinship and Friendship Networks of the Oil Workers and Young Tradesmen [D]*

### III. Summary and Conclusions

Through the analysis of data from only one of ten sample neighbourhoods in the town of Cajun Prairie, it has been shown that it is necessary to understand fundamental economic changes in order to comprehend the organization of networks within the neighbourhood. Four clusters of households, identified by the criteria of age, length of residence, occupation and household language, demonstrate markedly different linkages with kin, neighbours and with the rest of Cajun Prairie. Each sub-group has been associated with a different strategy in their respective management of cultural symbols and of identities. There does not appear to be a series of boundary markers or criteria that are shared evenly by all four sub-groups and which effectively delineate a separate Cajun ethnic group. Identities are, however, specific to sub-group communication and the necessity for the sub-groups to deal with the advantages or disadvantages of 'Cajun-ness'.

An important finding for this research team is that the bilingual merchants, those who are the most aware of cultural differences, are the most instrumental in leading a grassroots revival of Cajun Culture, and in deploying this revival within their own dealings with francophone clients in Cajun Prairie. The old landed families of the town, who have accepted the disadvantages of imposed differences, have little to gain from a change

in ethnic status. They therefore have been willing to accept the stigmatization of Cajuns and the masking of their own Frenchness in favour of a self-acceptance in the dominant Anglo-Southern Society. The retired sharecroppers are also uninterested in identity management and perceive Cajunness in negative terms. Faced with a very narrow range of opportunities and virtually an ascribed identity, they make no effort to relate to cultural difference on a day-to-day basis. The situation of the oil workers and younger tradesmen is developmental. As they make a greater commitment to Cajun Prairie, they become more involved with the activities of the bilingual group of merchants and professionals. This option does not pose any difficulties, and for men or women in their position, it may well be the path of least resistance.

From this small sample, it is not possible to predict the future of Cajun culture; however, it certainly appears to be more dynamic and more capable of mobilizing its members toward identity shifts than I had originally thought was possible. What is of concern to me at the moment is a comparative model. To which other sets of data on formerly stigmatized identities, from Eidheim's Lapps (Eidheim 1969), to Smith's Guatemalans (Smith 1977), is the Cajun material most comparable?

The amorphousness of Cajun culture, is reflected in the unstructured and segmentary organization of the current 'French Movement' in South Louisiana. The Cajuns themselves, even in the confines of a single community, form a number of clusters of individuals and households. Some of these clusters are economically shaped or even encircled by socio-linguistic barriers that date from the recently-disbanded sharecropping communities. Others, such as the cluster of long time settlers and the network of merchants and teachers, have deliberately opted to undercommunicate or over-communicate the symbolic and primordial aspects of cultural difference. In fact, is the action of the 'bilingual' middle class not an attempt to *create* differences where those differences have lost their value?

## NOTES

1. This paper was first presented at a conference on "New Dimensions in Structural Analysis" (University of Toronto—March 1978). My sincere thanks are extended to Dean Louder, Robin Ostow, Grace Anderson, Ulf Hannerz, and David Haas, for their thoughtful comments and suggestions.
2. There is considerable ambiguity in the interpretation of the word 'Créole' within Louisiana. Dominguez (1977) has commented on the passage of the primary meaning of Creole as a referent for the white Franco-hispanic planter class to a category that has been self-selected by francophone blacks and free men of colour, the *gens de couleur* ('mulattoes' and 'yellows' are derogatory labels used

by whites and blacks). Waddell (1979b) has commented on the cohesiveness of *gens de couleur* by comparing them to the nationless Métis. Informants over 60, in all of our sample communities, also use the self-referent Creole in place of Cajun (see note 8).

3. Bertrand (1955) has commented on the contrasts between French- and English-speaking parishes in Louisiana, a contrast that is most visible in behaviour among the inhabitants of the 'border' or 'frontier' of French Louisiana. This area, immediately north of Cajun Prairie, is where significant concentrations of *gens de couleur* can still be clearly identified.
4. Cajun is probably an American introduction. The French pronunciation of Acadian, is *Acadien*. The contemporary pronunciation of Acadian is usually 'cadien' and the best English gloss is 'cadjin' (David Marcantel, 1977—personal communication).
5. This phase of my research was assisted by funding from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The data discussed in this paper were collected and interpreted in 1976 with the invaluable assistance of Paul Leventhal, Jean Claude St. Hilaire, Alain Larouche, Louis Assier and Louis-Jacques Dorais—all of whom are, or have been affiliated with the Département d'anthropologie, Université Laval.
6. Taking the notion of code, as advanced by Bernstein, and extending it to a wider group of behaviours, including language, may be overextending the socio-linguistic meaning of the word. Nevertheless, such an extension is very useful in explaining ethnic behaviour in a network context (for a similar extension, see Paine 1976).
7. Most oilfield workers together with local crew-mates, drive over a hundred miles to Morgan City or to Intercoastal City, where they are taken to offshore 'rigs' (drilling platforms) by helicopter. This type of work is by far the highest-paying unskilled labour available (over \$12,000 a year in 1976) to young men in Cajun Prairie. High school graduates and 'dropouts' who wish to remain in the region talk of 'going offshore' as a way of achieving financial security and a middle-class life style. Oil workers in their thirties and forties, talk of retiring from dangerous offshore work and opening small businesses in Cajun Prairie. These are the men who are closest to the merchants in group 'C'.
8. In Cajun Prairie, the *gens de couleur* recognize themselves as a separate group ["Creoles"!]: endogamous and phenotypically different from blacks or whites (lighter than blacks, straight hair, Caucasian features, etc.). Most people in this group live in the countryside and some have prosperous farms. Significantly, whites do not recognize the *gens de couleur* as a separate group, although some white males hunt or play music with them and refer to *gens de couleur* as "good negroes" (*bons nègres*). The terms 'mulatto' or 'yellow' are not frequently used in Cajun Prairie.
13. Between 1940 and 1960 the town of Cajun Prairie more than doubled in population (1,379, in 1940 to 2,928 in 1960) while its surrounding countryside steadily declined through out-migration to Cajun Prairie and to other towns (7,342, in 1940 to 6,320 in 1960). In the same period Cajun Prairie received virtually no migrants from outside the surrounding rural parish. Our census of Cajun Prairie in 1976 places the town population at about 4,000.
14. The suicide rate has 'always' been high in Cajun Prairie. Our research shows that many suicides were officially disguised so that the deceased could have

a Catholic burial. One possible reason for frequent suicides is the reduction of family and network support experienced by the aged. One person suggested that Cajuns of the Prairie knew when they should no longer be a burden to their families.

15. Bernard Deschênes (personal communication) finds that as the urban parish system of a working-class section of Quebec City (Limoilou) broke down, individuals were left with scattered family networks and a more transient and less intimate neighbourhood.
16. French-language radio has existed since the 1930's in Louisiana and some 130 hours of broadcasts still emanate from regional stations. Listeners tend not to monitor all available broadcasts, but focus on those offered by local announcers who speak of local events and businesses, and play locally-recorded music (Gold 1975b).
17. Dance halls that play French music have been in the towns since the turn of this century, but in the last thirty years, they have become the only locale where Cajun and Creole music is regularly played. The dancers are primarily couples over forty—former residents of the rural communities. Most people who attend the dances know the musicians personally and regularly request the same 'traditional' tunes.
18. The 'running' of Mardi Gras, formerly the task of several dozen mounted and masked male riders, is now accomplished by some 200 participants, about a third of whom are horseback riders. An unmasked *capitaine* garbed in the yellow and mauve colours of Mardi Gras, approaches a rural home to seek rice or a chicken for "charity". The Mardi Gras riders grab the chicken, perform the Mardi Gras dance, and the long line of revellers moves on to the next house followed by a wagon of musicians, a beer truck, and a caravan of motorized onlookers.
19. By "traditional" music, the leaders of popular revival (e.g., the Balfa Brothers of Cajun Prairie) refer to the music that had been formerly played in the kitchens and on the galleries of the coves, and not the songs that some folklorists have collected to show linkages with France and Quebec (e.g., Brandon 1978).
20. Quebec filmmaker André Gladu made a series of films for Radio Canada that deal with Cajun and Creole life in the Cajun Prairie area, all of which feature local broadcaster and announcer Revon Reed (cf. Gold 1979d for a discussion of the ideological message of these films). Similar broadcasts have been made by Belgian television broadcasters Françoise l'Empereur and Robert Sacré, and by Michel Tauriac for Radio Franc-Inter. In the United States, the PBS, NBC, and networks have all covered the Cajun Prairie Mardi Gras, radio broadcasts and musicians.
21. CODOFIL: The Council for the Development of French in Louisiana was founded as a public agency in 1969 to assist in the "development" of the French language in Louisiana. An ambitious elementary school program was developed under the leadership of ex-congressman James Domengeaux, a leader whom some regional school boards found to be autocratic in his placement of up to 300 visiting teachers from France, Quebec and Belgium. Thus it was this local-national conflict that led to the withdrawal of the CODOFIL program from Cajun Prairie and its replacement by a Federally-sponsored Title VII Bilingual Program directed from the parish seat. The new program continues to draw on CODOFIL's foreign teachers to supplement locally-recruited staff. Significantly, neither program has been able to generate strong local political support among

the merchants of group 'C'. The difficulties of the state-wide school revival of French and the conflicts between local and national objectives are examined in detail in Gold 1979e.

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